

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 22, 2021

The Honorable Kilolo Kijakazi
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Acting Commissioner Kijakazi,

Thank you for your leadership of the Social Security Administration (SSA) during this challenging time. SSA plays a vital role in providing some of the most fundamental services that Americans across the country depend on to go about their daily lives. We write today to share some of the significant concerns that we have received from our constituents regarding SSA's ability to maintain these services during the COVID-19 pandemic and to request information on how the Administration will address these issues in the months ahead.

As you are aware, there are more than 1,200 Social Security field offices nationwide, intended to provide essential resources for the communities and vulnerable populations they serve.

Unfortunately, all local Social Security offices have been closed to the public for in-person services since March 17, 2020. Although we understand the Administration's initial intention to protect at-risk individuals from COVID-19, we now find ourselves nearly two years into this pandemic with a wide array of scientifically proven methods to keep people safe.

Field office closures have presented particular difficulty for constituents who need to show original documents – such as a driver's licenses, birth and death certificates, or passports – in order for SSA to process their claims. Since offices are closed, individuals cannot show these documents in-person, and SSA has generally required them to mail these documents into the field office. This creates additional stress for individuals with time-sensitive cases, who must now send their original documents through the mail for an unknown amount of time, with the possibility of being lost or disrupting their claim processing.

During this period, field offices have continued providing limited services over the phone, however, we have received reports of wait times exceeding 45 minutes and instances of phone lines being over-loaded by call volume. Given the fundamental nature of many services provided by SSA, we are certain you can understand the highly distressing nature of these disruptions for our constituents.

With these concerns in mind, please respond to the following:

1. What is SSA's timeline and plan for reopening Social Security field offices?

2. While we understand there are limited in person appointments available, what is the plan for expanding these appointments until SSA field offices reach full capacity?
3. What precautions will SSA take to ensure the safety of staff and individuals seeking in-person services through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Your swift response to these important questions will help to alleviate the concerns of many Social Security beneficiaries across the country.

Sincerely,



John Katko

Member of Congress



Kathleen Rice

Member of Congress